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For Immediate Release

WIPP Radiological Assistance Team Dispatched To Los Alamos as Precautionary Measure

CARLSBAD, N.M., May 11, 2000 – A team of radiological experts has been dispatched from the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in response to a week-long forest fire that is threatening Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), one of the nation's premiere research laboratories.

"We are responding completely as a precautionary measure," said Jere Galle, team leader for the WIPP Radiological Assistance Program (RAP) team. "It is our understanding that nuclear materials at LANL are not in harm's way. Our primary concern, however, is always to protect human health and the environment."

The RAP team's mission is to provide radiological assistance to federal agencies, state, tribal and local governments, and to private businesses or individuals for incidents involving radiological materials. The Atomic Energy Act of 1954 gives DOE the authority to protect human health and the environment where the use of nuclear materials is involved.

The WIPP RAP team will provide radiological air monitoring downwind of the Los Alamos fire. The team's findings will be reported to the on-scene Central Command Post.

DOE maintains RAP teams in eight different regions nationally. The WIPP RAP team is dispatched through the DOE Albuquerque Operations Office, which provides Region 4 radiological assistance for New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas.

The RAP team is dispatched, as dictated by the incident scenario, to the site of any radiological incident involving, or suspected to involve, DOE facilities, operations or shipment of nuclear materials.